

Grades, Graduation and Diplomas



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The contents of this guide are an update of the 1995 Grades, Graduation and Diplomas Special Education Bulletin that was reviewed by the Office of Civil Rights. That review culminated with a letter from the Office of Civil Rights approving its content. The Office of Public Instruction has not sought similar scrutiny for this guide whose intent is to provide technical assistance to schools regarding appropriate procedures to use with students with disabilities served under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, as amended.

Technical Assistance guides are developed by the Division of Special Education to provide guidance to schools, parents and advocates regarding eligibility for and the implementation of services to students with disabilities under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, the Administrative Rules of Montana, and Montana statutes.

This document contains recommended practices and procedures that may enhance the services to children and youth with disabilities. All policy statements regarding the delivery of special education and related services are contained in the current *Montana State Plan Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act*.

If you have questions after reviewing this guide, please contact the Division of Special Education at 444-5661.

Comments, additional questions or suggestions regarding this guide may be sent to:

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Please visit our website at:

www.opi.state.mt.us/speced/

Grades, Graduation and Diplomas

The Board of Public Education and local school districts have the authority to set graduation standards, grading policies and conditions for awarding diplomas, as long as those policies do not violate individual rights. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) mandates that awarding other than a regular diploma to a graduating student with disabilities may require a district to provide free appropriate public education (FAPE) after graduation. Section 504 of the 1973 Rehabilitation Act prohibits discrimination in the implementation of grading policies, setting of graduation requirements, and awarding of diplomas.

Grades

1. What are “modified grades”?

Modified grades are grades that are based on a curriculum that is modified for an individual student.

Modified grading systems are appropriate, as long as the school district ensures that the grading policies and practices of the district are not discriminatory. For example, a school district may offer a pass/fail grading system for students receiving special education in general education classes only if the pass/fail grading system is available to all students, regardless of disability. Modified grades are also appropriate for a student in a regular or unmodified curriculum, but evaluated under different standards or criteria.

2. May a student with a disability who receives special education accommodations or modifications in a general education classroom be given modified grades?

If grades are the standard used for granting credit in a general education class, then students with disabilities enrolled in that class for credit shall receive grades. Grades provide a measure that a student has or has not successfully mastered the subject matter in a particular subject area and provide the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) team with information that will help make appropriate educational decisions.

Students with disabilities enrolled in general education classes for the purpose of learning the subject matter or working on the objectives identified in the IEP should receive modified grades if the IEP team has determined that the student needs modified grades as outlined in the IEP.

3. May students with a disability enrolled in a general education class be excluded from grading ?

Students with disabilities enrolled in a general education class for no credit would not be graded in the content area, but would receive grading or evaluation based upon criteria outlined in the IEP, such as progress on annual goals.

4. Should a general education teacher or a special education teacher assign the modified grade for a student with a disability in a general education classroom?

Local school district policy and administrative practices determine which teacher is responsible for assigning the grade. When a modified grade is necessary, grading should be a collaborative effort between the general and special educators. The standards for modified grading should be addressed in the IEP.

Transcripts

5. May classes be identified as special education classes on the high school student's transcript to indicate that the student has had a modified curriculum in a general education class?

Phrases such as "Special Education English," "Inclusion Math" or "Resource Math" should not appear on the transcript. Phrases such as "English Essentials," or "Practical Math Applications" or other descriptive phrases that do not identify the class or student as special education must be used.

6. May asterisks, symbols or codes be written on a high school student transcript to indicate that the student has had a modified curriculum in a general education class?

Modifications or exceptions to the grading scale may be identified, as long as the indication of modifications or exceptions does not identify the student as having a disability or being in special education. An asterisk or other symbol after the grade may denote that the student received modified grades or completed work at a lower grade level. However, the explanation of the asterisk or other symbol on the transcript must not indicate the student's participation in special education. The school district must be careful in providing any information on the transcript that may later have a discriminatory impact on the student's admission to post-secondary educational institutions or future employment.

If an asterisk (*) indicates "individualized learner objectives," then use of the asterisk would have to be available to all students, regardless of disability. School district policy must address that all students who participate in a class with a modified curriculum will receive a modified grade by notation of an asterisk or another symbol on their transcript. If the district policy does not provide for noting a modified curriculum for all students who are in a modified curriculum, such as honors classes or advanced placement classes, then symbols cannot be used for special education students only.

7. May an adult student with a disability or a parent disclose the student's participation in special education services to a postsecondary educational institution or employer?

It is the choice of the candidate for admission or applicant for employment to disclose relevant information regarding a disability. Disclosure of information relating to a disability or special education services and accommodations to postsecondary educational institutions and/or employers could be very beneficial to the student. Information used properly may lead to appropriate accommodations for the student.

Grades, Class Ranking and Honor Roll

8. Must modified grades earned in special education or general education classes be included in districtwide Grade Point Average (GPA) standings for purposes of ranking of students by GPA for honor roll and college scholarships?

An honor roll policy may not use participation in special education as a basis for exclusion from the honor roll. In determining GPA or class ranking, a school district may not exclude students receiving modified grades, special education services or assign these students a lower ranking. Any policy and practice with regard to assigning students honor roll status must be based on objective criteria commensurate with the purpose of the ranking and implemented districtwide. A school district may use uniform standards for measuring academic achievement even though some students with disabilities may not be able to perform at higher levels. A school district policy may not use participation in special education as a reason to bar students from competition for valedictorian, salutatorian or class ranking for scholarships.

When a school district's policy disallows special education students from being placed on the honor roll, the school district shall provide these students the opportunity to earn awards and honors reflecting their efforts and achievement.

9. May a school district implement a weighted grading system that arbitrarily assigns lower grade weights to all special education courses?

For purposes of determining grades, weighting of courses based solely on the status of the class as a special education class or the classification of the student as having a disability would violate Section 504. A school district may not arbitrarily assign the lowest weight in a weighted grading scale formula to all special education classes. The school district may use a weighted grading system that assigns lower grade weights to special education courses, as long as the lower weighting results from an assessment of actual differences in the difficulty of all courses, including special education and general education classes. The academic distinctions must be applied to all students equally without regard to disability and based upon objective criteria closely related to the purpose of the program.

Graduation

10. Is a Child Study Team meeting required prior to graduation from high school?

No.

11. Is an Individualized Education Program meeting required prior to graduation from high school?

Before a student receives a diploma, the IEP team must meet to review the student's IEP to assure:

- the school district's graduation requirements will be met, or
- the student's measurable annual goals will be substantially completed, and
- new measurable annual goals are not needed for the coming school year.

If the IEP team determines that the student has met the district's graduation requirements or substantially completed the measurable annual goals and does not need new measurable annual goals, then the IEP team would not develop a new Individualized Education Program and the student would graduate with a regular diploma at the end of the current school year.

If the IEP team determines that the student will not meet the district's graduation requirements or will not substantially complete the measurable annual goals, and the student is not expected to graduate with a regular diploma at the end of the current school year and will not exceed the district's age limitations, the IEP team will develop a new Individualized Education Program for the next school year with new measurable annual goals.

12. What are the school district responsibilities prior to graduation from high school?

Graduation from high school with a regular diploma constitutes a change in placement, requiring written prior notice. A sample Graduation Notice form is included in this guide.

13. May a student who has graduated from high school continue to receive special education services under IDEA ?

Graduation with a regular diploma will satisfy the district's obligation to provide a free appropriate public education under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. This means that the district is no longer required to provide special education and related services after graduation.

A student's eligibility for special education services may also end if the student no longer meets school district age qualifications.

Diplomas

14. Are all special education students eligible to receive a regular diploma?

Montana administrative rules state that a student who has successfully completed the goals identified on an IEP shall be awarded a regular diploma and attend the same graduation ceremony consistent with school district policy.

15. May requirements for granting a diploma be waived for students with disabilities?

Each school district shall provide for a waiver of the district established learner outcomes in order to accommodate the needs of special education students. Learner outcomes that are waived must be identified on the student's IEP.

The school district is permitted to waive specific course requirements based on individual student needs and performance levels. Waiver requests shall be considered with respect to age, maturity, interest, and aspirations of the student and shall be in consultation with the student's parents or guardians. The IEP team must follow local district policy when considering waivers for students with disabilities.

16. May a school district use different wording on the diploma received by a student with a disability?

School districts are encouraged to use the same language on all diplomas for all students. If a school district awards a diploma other than a regular diploma to a student with disabilities, the district may still be responsible to provide FAPE beyond graduation.

The diploma awarded to each student must be similar in all significant respects. If a school district offers different types of diplomas based upon a specific course of study, then all diploma options must be available to all students, regardless of whether the student has a disability. The language on the diploma may differentiate between the student who “has completed the course of study prescribed by the board of trustees” or who “has completed a prescribed course of study in accord with requirements established by the board of trustees.”

Appendix

The following pages give appropriate and inappropriate examples of documents such as:

Report Cards

Transcripts

Notice of Graduation

Examples of Appropriate and Inappropriate Diplomas and Certificates

The grayed area of each document identifies appropriate or inappropriate language for school districts to consider when modifying or developing their own documents.

Appropriate Report Card

NAME NICA PERRA TEACHER LARSEN SCHOOL JEFFERSON GRADE 7 YEAR 03

QUARTER	1	2	3	4	QUARTER	1	2	3	4	PROMOTED TO GRADE
READING					ART					1 ST QUARTER COMMENTS
Effort					MUSIC					
Written Assignments					Conduct					
ENGLISH					Pitch accuracy					
Effort					PHYSICAL EDUCATION					
Mechanics/Usage					Effort/Attitude					
Written Expression					Participation					2 ND QUARTER COMMENTS
Assignments					MODIFIED CURRICULUM					
SPELLING					Reading					
Effort					Language					
Weekly List					Mathematics					
Written Assignments					Social Studies					
PENMANSHIP					Spelling					3 RD QUARTER COMMENTS
MATHEMATICS					COOPERATION					
Effort					Works well with others					
Problem Solving					Participates in class activities					
Computation					Assumes responsibility for own actions					
Basic Facts					Follows school rules					
Tests					COURTESY					
Assignments					Shows self control					4 TH QUARTER COMMENTS
SOCIAL STUDIES					Respects others					
Effort					Polite and considerate					
Assignments					WORK HABITS					
Tests					Follows directions					
SCIENCE					Works independently					
Effort					Uses time wisely					
Assignments					Organizational skills					
Tests					Completes assignments on time					

A – Excellent B – Above Average C – Average D – Below Average F – Failing
I – Incomplete S – Satisfactory

+ – Area of Strength * – Modified Assignment ✓ – Needs Improvement x – Participation
N/A – Not Applicable

INAPPROPRIATE REPORT CARD

NAME NICA PERRA TEACHER LARSEN SCHOOL JEFFERSON GRADE 7 YEAR 03

QUARTER	1	2	3	4	QUARTER	1	2	3	4	PROMOTED TO GRADE
READING					ART					1 ST QUARTER COMMENTS
Effort					MUSIC					
Written Assignments					Conduct					
ENGLISH					Pitch accuracy					
Effort					PHYSICAL EDUCATION					
Mechanics/Usage					Effort/Attitude					
Written Expression					Participation					2 ND QUARTER COMMENTS
Assignments					SPECIAL EDUCATION					
SPELLING					Resource Room Reading					
Effort					Resource Room Language					
Weekly List					Resource Room Mathematics					
Written Assignments					Resource Room Social Studies					
PENMANSHIP					Resource Room Spelling					3 RD QUARTER COMMENTS
MATHEMATICS					COOPERATION					
Effort					Works well with others					
Problem Solving					Participates in class activities					
Computation					Assumes responsibility for own actions					
Basic Facts					Follows school rules					
Tests					COURTESY					
Assignments					Shows self control					4 TH QUARTER COMMENTS
SOCIAL STUDIES					Respects others					
Effort					Polite and considerate					
Assignments					WORK HABITS					
Tests					Follows directions					
SCIENCE					Works independently					
Effort					Uses time wisely					
Assignments					Organizational skills					
Tests					Completes assignments on time					

A – Excellent B – Above Average C – Average D – Below Average F – Failing
 I – Incomplete S – Satisfactory
 + – Area of Strength * – Modified Assignment ✓ – Needs Improvement x – Participation
 N/A – Not Applicable

Appropriate Report Card

STIPEK HIGH SCHOOL

STUDENT: Nica Perra

TERM 3 CREDITS EARNED : 20.0

GRADE: 10

DOB: March 5, 1988

TERM 3 GPA: 2.500

COUNSELOR: ANN HUTCHINS

COURSE	TEACHER	GRADE	CREDITS
*US History	Anderson	C-	5.0
Work Experience	Covey	NC	
PE 3	Howard	A	2.5
Weight Training	Penn	A	2.5
*Biology Grade reflects teacher collaboration	Ronco	D-	5.0
Creative Foods 1	Wirth	B	5.0
*Basic Math	Jones	A-	5.0
*Collaborative English	Lee	B+	5.0

*Grade based on modified curriculum

Inappropriate Report Card

STIPEK HIGH SCHOOL

STUDENT: Nica Perra

TERM 3 CREDITS EARNED : 20.0

GRADE: 10

DOB: March 5, 1988

TERM 3 GPA: 2.500

COUNSELOR: ANN HUTCHINS

COURSE	TEACHER	GRADE	CREDITS
US History	Anderson	C-	5.0
Work Experience	Covey	NC	
PE 3	Howard	A	2.5
Weight Training	Penn	A	2.5
Biology	Ronco	D-	5.0
Grade based upon Individual Education Program			
Creative Foods 1	Wirth	B	5.0
Special Ed Math	Jones	A-	5.0
Resource English	Lee	B+	5.0

APPROPRIATE TRANSCRIPT

STIPEK HIGH SCHOOL

3800 South Logan, Stipek, Montana 59011
(406) 444-0907

Transcript printed on 1/3/05

Class of 2004
Birthdate: 9/24/85
Cum GPA: 2.539

Total Credits Earned: 182.50
Class Rank: 151 out of 179

	COURSE	GRADE	CREDIT	GRADE	CREDIT
2000-2001 Stipek High	Basic Art & Design	C	5.00		
	Challenge of History	B	5.00		
	**Eng 9 GC/LC	D	5.00	C	5.00
	General Math	B	5.00	B	5.00
	HS Science	C	5.00	B	5.00
	Mixed Chorus	A	5.00	B	5.00
2001-2002 Stipek High	**Consumer Math	A	5.00	A	5.00
	Eng 10 GC	C	5.00		
	Eng 10 LS	C	5.00		
	Geo/World History	C	5.00	C	5.00
	Clogging	B	5.00		
	Work Experience	P	5.00		
2002-2003 Stipek High	Algebra 12	C	10.00		
	Contemporary Furniture	C	5.00		
	English 11	C	5.00		
	Work Experience	P	10.00		
	Albanian History	C	10.00		
2003-2004 Stipek High	**Accounting 1	A	10.00		
	Earth Science	B	5.00		
	English 11	P	10.00		
	Geometry	C	5.00		
	Mixed Chorus	B	2.50		
2004-2005 Stipek High	Adult Proficiencies	B	5.00		
	**Algebra 3-4	B	5.00	B	5.00
	Creative Foods 1	A	10.00	A	10.00
	Current Issues	A	10.00	A	10.00
	English 4	B	5.00	C	5.00

**Grade based on modified curriculum

INAPPROPRIATE TRANSCRIPT

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2000-2001 Stipek High	Basic Art & Design	C	5.00		
	Challenge of History	B	5.00		
	Special Ed Eng 9 GC/LC	D	5.00	C	5.00
	General Math	B	5.00	B	5.00
	HS Science	B	5.00	B	5.00
	Mixed Chorus	A	5.00	B	5.00
2001-2002 Stipek High	Consumer Math	A	5.00	A	5.00
	Eng 10 GC	C	5.00		
	Eng 10 LS	C	5.00		
	Geo/World History	C	5.00	C	5.00
	Clogging	B	5.00		
	Work Experience	P	5.00		
2002-2003 Stipek High	Algebra 12	C	10.00		
	Contemporary Furniture	C	5.00		
	Special Education English	C	5.00		
	Work Experience	P	10.00		
	Albanian History	C	10.00		
2003-2004 Stipek High	Accounting 1	A	10.00		
	Earth Science	B	5.00		
	English 11	P	10.00		
	Geometry	C	5.00		
	Mixed Chorus	B	2.50		
2004-2005 Stipek High	Adult Proficiencies	B	5.00		
	Algebra 3-4	B	5.00	B	5.00
	Creative Foods 1	A	10.00	A	10.00
	Current Issues	A	10.00	A	10.00
	English 4	B	5.00	C	5.00

Student Name: _____

IEP Date: _____

HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION

(check one box)

- ☐ The IEP team determined that the student **will meet** the district's graduation requirements, **or** will substantially complete the measurable annual goals **and** will not need new measurable annual goals. The IEP team will not develop a new Individualized Education Program and the student **is** expected to graduate with a regular diploma at the end of the current school year.
- ☐ The IEP team determined that the student **will not meet** the district's graduation requirements, **or** will not substantially complete the measurable annual goals, and will need new measurable annual goals for the coming school year. The student **is not** expected to graduate with a regular diploma at the end of the current school year and the IEP team must develop a new Individualized Education Program for the next school year.